

CHI ST. JOSEPH HEALTH EMS

Texas EMS Provider Leverages Wristbands with Pulsara to Manage Large-Scale Pre-Planned Events



THE CHALLENGE

For years, St. Joseph Health EMS had managed medical response for the Texas Renaissance Festival, an event that draws hundreds of thousands of guests each year. Ahead of the 2023 festival, however, St. Joseph Health was informed that the event would be looking elsewhere for its medical service needs. Then, just a few weeks before the festival was scheduled to begin, St. Joseph Health was notified that the alternative options weren't equipped to handle the high volume of the event after all.

Billy Rice, St. Joseph Health's market director of EMS and Air Med 12, said, "About a month before the festival, they realized it wouldn't work. They called us and asked us to help." While the task of managing an event with over 40,000 daily attendees would seem daunting to any provider on such short notice, St. Joseph Health EMS was committed to serving their community. "Of course," Rice said, "it's our people and our county, so we stepped up and pulled it off."



With a total of over half a million guests during the festival's eight consecutive weekends, St. Joseph Health EMS had to be prepared to efficiently triage and document hundreds of daily patient cases amid the chaos of the festival. Traditional emergency management methods would surely fall short in such a demanding scenario. "In years past, it would be very difficult to know how many people you had in the tent, who was being treated, and their acuity level," said Rice. "We were doing everything on paper and a few laptops. Real-time situational awareness didn't really exist."

With only a month to gather and organize resources before the event, St. Joseph Health needed an emergency management system that was easy to use, readily available, and could scale to fit the needs of the EMS teams.

THE SOLUTION

At the time, St. Joseph Health had partnered with Pulsara to help manage large-scale pre-planned emergencies. Pulsara is a healthcare communications and logistics platform that facilitates incident management, patient tracking, and care coordination between healthcare providers. While Pulsara alone would be an effective tool in scenarios like the Texas Renaissance Festival,



St. Joseph Health EMS is the emergency service provider linked to the St. Joseph Health Regional Hospital Emergency & Trauma Center in Bryan, Texas. As one of the highest-accredited emergency facilities in their region, St. Joseph Health's EMS teams are dedicated to providing the highest standard of emergency care across the counties they serve.

KEY RESULTS

- ▶ St. Joseph Health EMS used Pulsara and Texas's emergency wristbands to triage and track hundreds of patients during large-scale pre-planned incidents.
- ▶ 150 daily patients during the Texas Renaissance Festival.
- ▶ Over 200 patients during a single concert.

it also enabled St. Joseph Health EMS to utilize a new emergency resource provided by the State of Texas: barcode wristbands.

The wristbands, each tagged with a scannable barcode, were introduced statewide

in 2023 with hopes that they would ease friction between different medical documentation systems and improve patient tracking during mass casualty incidents. Initially, it was difficult for some Texas EMS teams to see the purpose of the wristband initiative. "People didn't understand where the wristbands were going or how it would be helpful," Billy Rice said. "Once we added Pulsara, the value of the wristbands immediately sold itself." During an incident, any caregiver can give a patient an emergency wristband and then, with a mobile device, scan the barcode to create a patient channel within Pulsara. Scanning a patient's ID populates the channel with patient information so care can begin as quickly as possible. Downstream members of the care team can scan the wristband at any point and be added to the channel instantly, accessing patient information, vitals, and any documented activities from previous care. During high-volume patient events, these wristbands save time and eliminate miscommunications during transfers and handoffs. For incident commanders at RACs and other response organizations, wristband scanning at each stage in the patient journey allows for impeccable patient tracking across facilities and organizations.



The Brazos Valley RAC, which oversees all EMS in St. Joseph Health's region, had implemented both the Texas wristbands and Pulsara for ambulance to ED communication in October 2022. St. Joseph Health's EMS teams had ample familiarity with the tools, so preparing for a massive festival within a few weeks was an achievable goal. With the demanding size of the festival, St. Joseph Health relied on other organizations, like the Bryan Fire Department, for staffing and support. With local teams already trained on how to use Pulsara for emergencies, integrating into St. Joseph Health's gameplan was seamless.

THE RESULTS

With an on-site dispatcher to receive calls, festivalgoers could receive the care they needed by calling 911, speaking with event staff, or walking to the nearest EMS station. Over the eight weekends of the Texas Renaissance Festival, Pulsara and barcode wristbands were used together to successfully manage thousands of patients. "We saw 150 patients a day, and everyone got a wristband," Billy Rice said. With color-coded triaging and ID scanning, EMS teams were able to clearly track exactly who was in the tent and what they needed. The onsite dispatcher received all of the necessary information to manage patient transfers via ambulance and allocate resources to emergencies outside festival grounds when necessary.

Between two of the festival weekends, St. Joseph Health EMS also staffed a country music concert that created over 200 patients in just a few hours due to high heat, long lines, and poor water availability.

While the situation was hectic, St. Joseph Health's patient management remained highly coordinated. "This is where the use of the Pulsara incident management system transformed my organization," Billy Rice said. "The numbers generated that day took it to the next level."

After seeing St. Joseph Health's astonishing patient numbers during these major events, the Texas Department of Emergency Management (TDEM) is leveraging Pulsara alongside the statewide wristbands to assist a new regional emergency management group. This organization will be able to direct response resources, track patients, and reunify them with their families as major emergencies unfold. As for St. Joseph Health EMS, Billy Rice says, "My crews will not go back; they're completely hooked. The dispatchers love it. The field staff loves it. The administration loves it. We've never had access to this level of transparency."

